Coming to Columbia

Essential Information for New International Students

This guide 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-1 student status through your first few weeks in New York as you settle in.

By: Columbia University International Students and Scholars Office (ISSO)
Before Entering the U.S.
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. In order to prepare for this great journey, do the following things before entering the U.S.

1. Budget for New York
It’s not cheap!

The funding amount listed on your I-20 or DS-2019 gives a good idea of how much you can expect to need to pay for your tuition, fees, and living expenses for the academic year. The amount is realistic, but conservative. It is possible that you will require more than this amount per month. If you are bringing your family, your expenses will also be higher. You should also take into account currency fluctuations, ensuring that you have more than the required amount available in the event the value of your country’s currency decreases. For one of many online currency converters, go to www.xe.com.

Expenses to Keep in Mind

- 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. can be high, even when you have health insurance. All students are required to carry health insurance, and it is strongly recommended that your dependents be 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.

2. Buy Your Plane Ticket
But check your I-20!

- Don’t make your travel plans until you have your I-20 and entry visa.

- Before buying your plane ticket, remember you may enter the United States up to 30 days before the date listed on your I-20 or DS-2019.

- When you are ready to purchase your ticket, note that 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.

3. Pack!
Be prepared

When you arrive to the United States, it is important to carry your immigration-related documents, US currency and credit card(s) 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 a while.

- Experienced travelers recommend a change of clothing and toiletry items in case of unexpected delays, missed flight connections, or lost luggage. If you come from a warm climate, it’s advisable to wait until you get to NY to buy winter clothes and boots.

Weather Information

During the summer, June through September, the weather is often hot and humid and requires lightweight clothing. The temperature ranges from 70 degrees Fahrenheit (21 degrees Celsius) to the 90s (above 32 degrees Celsius). A raincoat and an umbrella will be useful as there is considerable rain.
The winter season, late November through March, is marked by sudden and extreme weather changes; several days of cold weather may be followed by days of moderate temperatures. The range in winter is between 20 degrees Fahrenheit (-7 degrees Celsius) and 45 degrees Fahrenheit (7 degrees Celsius), and occasionally the temperature drops to zero (-18 degrees Celsius). Days with snow or rain alternate with periods of clear and bright weather. The area around Columbia is quite windy.

The spring and fall seasons are generally moderate, the temperatures ranging from the 50s Fahrenheit (10 degrees Celsius) to the 70s (20s Celsius).

Updated weather information for New York City can be found on the Weather Channel web page: www.weather.com/.

3. Get an Arrival Record (Passport Stamp and I-94)

It’s evidence of your legal entry, status, and length of stay

A CBP officer will stamp your passport as admitted in F-1 or J-1 status for “D/S” (duration of status). If you arrive at an airport you will have an online record of your arrival as well; land borders give out an I-94 paper card.

Check your online arrival record

A day or two after arrival check your online arrival record to be sure you were admitted as an F-1 or J-1 for D/S. The online arrival/departure record can be obtained and printed here: https://i94.cbp.dhs.gov/I94/.

4. Get to Columbia

You’ve made it!

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.

General Airport Transportation Information

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

Taking a Taxi

The easiest way to get to your destination from the airport is by taxi. Follow the “Taxi” 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.
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 the bridge into Manhattan—about $7. Destinations in other boroughs are based on the metered fare. You may pay with a credit card or cash. Use ONLY official yellow or green taxis.

When telling the taxi driver your destination, you should tell them the street address and the cross streets. For example, you might say 605 West 113th Street between Broadway and Riverside Drive.

Taking a Bus or Shared Van

Shared vans, such as SuperShuttle, are less expensive than taxis and will take you to your door but will be making stops for other passengers. Buses also run from the airports to Midtown Manhattan.

First Week ‘To-Do’ List

We know that relocating to a new country in one of the fastest-paced cities in the world is an exciting, but challenging experience. It is advisable to come early, before your academic commitments begin, to allow you time to settle in, get to know your way around, and to meet new people. Do these 8 things your first week in NYC!

1. Report Your Arrival
   It’s Mandatory!

The final step in ensuring your F-1 or J-1 status is valid is to report your arrival to the ISSO or IAO. 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.

   Report your arrival online (within your first 7 days in the U.S.) here: http://tinyurl.com/issocheckin

2. Look for Housing
   It may be challenging

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 accommodations.

University Housing for Undergraduate Students

Undergraduate degree students attending Columbia College and the School of Engineering and Applied Science (SEAS) are guaranteed university housing. Undergrads should receive information regarding housing from the Office of Undergraduate Admissions and adhere to the application deadlines. Learn more about housing on Columbia University’s housing website: www.columbia.edu/cu/housing/.

University Housing for Graduate Students

Graduate students are not guaranteed university housing. Students may apply for university housing through the University Apartment Housing (UAH) office. Detailed information regarding the types of available housing, the application process and information for tenants is available on their website: http://bit.ly/cufacilities. 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 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://bit.ly/cuochaintro) 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 works with two New York City real estate/relocation agencies. 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. Getting a lease without a U.S. credit history, employment, or a U.S. – based guarantor is very difficult.

Temporary Housing Options

Hotels in New York can be very expensive. Columbia’s Office of Work – Life has a comprehensive compilation of temporary accommodation useful to all new arrivals or visitors for a variety of budgets (http://bit.ly/cutemphousing).
Health Care

Health care in the United States is very good but can be very costly. There is no national medical care system -- you must pay for medical or mental health services. One cannot afford to be without health insurance because of high medical costs. Columbia University requires its students to have health insurance. It offers a two-part health care program: the Medical Services and the Columbia Student Medical Insurance Plan.

Please refer to the following websites for comprehensive information:

- 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.

Academics

Learn about U.S. teaching styles

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 topics will provide you with information about the U.S. education system and tips on how to have a successful academic experience at Columbia.

U.S. Higher Education System Structure

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.

To get more information including a general overview of the American education system, visit http://bit.ly/usedsystem.

Academic Success Tips

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.

- Know what is expected by the instructor. There is not one prescribed way of teaching or grading students at Columbia so each professor may have different expectations and requirements.

- Talk with your instructors. Professors here expect students to ask questions in class, immediately after it, or during office hours.

- 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. Remember that you are required to have a full-time course load.

- 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!

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. 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 (http://bit.ly/cuplagiarism) and offers support for citation management software (http://bit.ly/cucitation). Indiana University has a useful self-test tool available to all students to check their knowledge on recognizing plagiarism (http://bit.ly/indianatest).

Cheating on exams or homework is also a violation of the academic integrity standards. Talking during examinations, especially in another 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.

Research Resources at Columbia

Libraries

Columbia has one of the largest university collections in the United States. The extensive resources available in the 21 Columbia libraries include almost 12 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.

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/.

Spouse and Partner Information

Get involved!

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

Using Columbia Facilities

Spouses who are not studying at Columbia are not eligible for a Columbia ID; therefore they cannot access to most Columbia facilities. One exception is the gym, for which a family membership for a fee is allowed. 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 Work


Eligibility to apply for a Social Security Number

Social Security Numbers are issued only to those who have authorized employment 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) if 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

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

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 [http://bit.ly/tccep](http://bit.ly/tccep).

Public Libraries


Community Involvement

One to World ([www.one-to-world.org/](http://www.one-to-world.org/))

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.


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 ([https://www.newyorkcares.org/volunteer/](https://www.newyorkcares.org/volunteer/))

Get involved and meet people by volunteering your time. This organization can offer you opportunities for one day or throughout the year.

Public Libraries ([www.nypl.org/](http://www.nypl.org/))

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.

Information for Families with Children

Columbia University’s Office of Work/Life ([worklife.columbia.edu](http://worklife.columbia.edu)) 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) ([www.centerforchildrensinitiatives.org/](http://www.centerforchildrensinitiatives.org/)) has information about choosing different types of childcare.
The Day Care Council of New York (http://www.dccnyinc.org/) 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.

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 (http://insideschools.org/) is an extremely helpful independent guide to NYC public schools that provides practical tools to navigate the city’s school system. It has a tool for translating the information into many different languages. 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.
- NYC Department of Education website: schools.nyc.gov/ParentsFamilies/.

Culture Shock Support

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 Resources

Youtube Videos

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.


Online Resources

- Social Customs and Cultural Differences from EduPass.com: (http://www.edupass.org/culture/)

In-Person Workshops and Services

- 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.

Food, Furniture, Museums, and More

Find the best deals!

View the following lists (on our Foursquare page - http://bit.ly/issofoursquare) for some recommendations of:

- Cultural Institutions (http://bit.ly/issoculturalinst)
- Furniture and Other Household Items (http://bit.ly/issofurniture)
- Used Furniture and Other Household Items (http://bit.ly/issoused)
- Food (Supermarkets) (http://bit.ly/issofood)
- NYC Museums - Free Admission with a Columbia Student ID (http://bit.ly/cumuseumpassport)
- All NYC Museums (http://bit.ly/nymuseums)

Safety

Stay 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 publicsafety.columbia.edu which includes information on their operations, shuttle bus schedule, escort service, crime prevention, personal safety tips, and more.

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.
Personal Safety Tips

• 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,

• Protect your privacy online and be aware of scams on the phone, street and online. Be alert to phishing. Click here to watch an entertaining and informative short video on this subject.

• To view more tips from Public Safety visit: http://bit.ly/cupstips.

• For an entertaining and informative video on how to not be the victim of a crime or a scam watch “Campus Safety 101”: http://bit.ly/cusafety101.

Tuition

Make Your Payments

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 (http://sfs.columbia.edu/billing) for information related to billing and payment.

Public Transportation

Learn how to get around

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.

Using a Metro Card

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 $2.75 (as of July 2015) regardless of distance. www.mta.info/metrocard/

There are two kinds of MetroCards:

1) The Unlimited Ride MetroCard 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 various denominations at a metro-card vending machine at subway stations. You get an automatic free transfer between subway and bus, or between buses, within a two-hour period from the time you swipe the card for your first fare.

Transportation Resources

• 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.
• A list of useful NYC navigation apps: http://bit.ly/nycsmartapps

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. 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.

Spiritual Life

Connect with others

For information about religious life on campus, learn about the Earl Hall Center (http://ouc.columbia.edu/). Its mission 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 Religious Life Advisors.
Maintaining Legal Status
It is your personal responsibility to maintain lawful F-1 or J-1 student status.

Follow the Guidelines
It’s the law!

The basic guidelines are listed at http://bit.ly/dhsstatus. The most important things to remember in your first term are to report your arrival, register for a full time course load and do not work without authorization. If you have any questions about your status, discuss them with an advisor at the ISSO or the IAO.

Returning from a Trip Abroad
Don’t leave without reading!

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 required 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. To learn more, visit http://bit.ly/isssof1travel (for F-1) or http://bit.ly/isssoj1travel (for J-1).

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 visa and entry information. A list of consulates in Manhattan can be found here: http://bit.ly/nycconsulates. The ISSO and IAO cannot advise on entry requirements of other countries.

Working in the U.S.

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 all students. 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 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), http://bit.ly/cucareered, 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, Graduate School of Arts and Sciences, and the School of the Arts. 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 (http://library.columbia.edu/), CUIT (Information Technology, https://cuit.columbia.edu/), computer labs (http://bit.ly/cucomputerlabs), the Public Safety office (http://www.columbia.edu/cu/publicsafety/), the Columbia Student Calling Center(columbia.thecallingcenter.com/), Dodge Fitness Center(http://www.dodgefitnesscenter.com/), and the CU Bartending Agency (http://columbiabartending.com/).

Off-Campus Employment

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. To learn more about F-1 work, visit our website: http://bit.ly/f1work-overview.

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. To learn more about J-1 work, visit our website: http://bit.ly/j1studentwork.

Tax Filing
It’s required!

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
Terms and Definitions
The following terms and acronyms will be used frequently throughout your stay in the United States.

Acronyms and Abbreviations

AT    Academic Training  
AVC   Application for Visa Certificate  
COE   Certificate of Eligibility  
CBP   U.S. Customs and Border Protection  
CPT   Curricular Practical Training  
DHS   Department of Homeland Security  
DMV   Department of Motor Vehicles  
DOS   Department of State  
EV    Exchange Visitor (J-1)  
EAD   Employment Authorization Document  
ICE   U.S. Immigration and Customs Enforcement  
IRS   Internal Revenue Service  
OPT   Optional Practical Training  
POE   Port of Entry  
SEVIS Student and Exchange Visitor information System  
SSA   Social Security Administration  
SSN   Social Security Number  
USCIS United States Citizenship and Immigration Service

Definitions

SEVIS - The Student and Exchange Visitor Information System (SEVIS) is a data collection and monitoring system that is used by U.S. academic institutions, the Department of Homeland Security (DHS) 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, and employment.

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 J-1 EVs include funding from a government, international organization or university. Students fully funded by Columbia are eligible for J-1 status.

Certificate of Eligibility (COE) - 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 a DHS official when you enter the U.S. 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 the COE for F-1 students generated by Columbia University’s ISSO or IAO for use in applying for the F-1 visa and entering the United States. You must keep all I-20s that are issued to you throughout your academic program.

DS-2019 - The DS-2019 is the COE 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 and other sponsored students will receive the DS-2019 from their sponsoring organization. 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 (http://bit.ly/reciprocityagree) 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. 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 entry 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 by checking your electronic record online.

I-94 Arrival / Departure record - The I-94 is the Arrival / Departure Record, in either paper (at land borders) or electronic format (at airports) which is given in addition to a passport stamp, all processed by a Customs and Border Protection (CBP) Officer.

(Click to www.columbia.edu/cu/isko/tax/) for detailed tax information and access to Glacier Tax Prep, a web-based tax preparation system for non residents. In addition, be sure to attend one of several New York State 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.
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 online arrival/departure record can be obtained at [https://i94.cbp.dhs.gov/i94/](https://i94.cbp.dhs.gov/i94/), and all students are encouraged to access their electronic admission record shortly after each arrival to check that their status is correct.

**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 authorized practical or academic training used after graduation, plus a grace period of 60 days for F-1 status and 30 days for J-1 status to prepare for departure.

---

**About the ISSO (International Students and Scholars Office) and the IAO (International Affairs Office)**

**Who Are We?**

The ISSO and IAO serve the immigration and documentation-related needs of students and scholars at Columbia University including Certificates of Eligibility for F and J status, travel, employment, and other matters relating to their immigration status at Columbia.

**Who Do We Serve?**

The ISSO serves students and scholars at
- the Morningside campus
- all doctoral students in the Graduate School of Arts and Sciences at both campuses
- Mailman School of Public Health at the CU Medical Center

The IAO serves 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).

**Our Services**

- **In-Person and Telephone Advising Services** - The ISSO and IAO offers advisory services during its operating hours.

- **Email Announcements** - Both the ISSO and IAO send email announcements updating students on immigration issues and deadlines and publicizing informational programs. You are responsible for reading the ISSOnews, as it is the primary vehicle for distributing timely and important immigration information.

- **Website Information** - View our website for information about visa and immigration regulations and other related matters.

---

**ISSO Address**

**(Morningside Campus)**

524 Riverside Drive  
(in International House North)  
New York, NY 10027  
(212) 854-3587  
http://www.columbia.edu/cu/isso/  
newintlstudent@columbia.edu (before arrival)  
isso@columbia.edu (after enrollment)

Mailing Address:

2960 Broadway, MC 5724  
New York, NY 10027

**ISSO Summer Office Hours** (through September 4, 2015)

Advising Hours: Monday, Tuesday, Thursday, 10:30 a.m. to 4:00 p.m.  
Telephone Hours: Monday, Tuesday, Thursday, 1:00 - 4:00 p.m.  
Closed Wednesday & Friday to the public.

**ISSO Fall Office Hours** (from September 8th on)

Advising Hours: Monday, Tuesday, Thursday, Friday, 10:30 a.m. to 4:00 p.m.  
Telephone Hours: Monday, Tuesday, Thursday, Friday, 1:00 - 4:00 p.m.  
Closed Wednesdays to the public.

---

**IAO Address**

**(Columbia University Medical Campus)**

650 West 168th St. (William Black Building)  
New York, NY 10032  
Room 1-126B  
(212) 305-5455  
Fax: (212) 305-5208  

Mailing Address:

630 West 168th Street, Box 27  
New York, NY 10027

**IAO Office Hours**

Monday - Friday, 11:00 a.m. to 5:00 p.m.