Greetings and Information from the International Students and Scholars Office (ISSO)

The ISSO welcomes all international students who are beginning a program of study at Columbia University! As an international student, you will have two statuses—an academic status as an enrolled student and an immigration status. The ISSO is the only University office authorized to oversee your immigration status.

The ISSO will participate in the Orientation Program of your school of enrollment by conducting an Essential Immigration Information session to provide an overview of the rules and regulations related to F-1 and J-1 status in the United States. Topics to be covered include: maintaining legal status, rules for travelling and re-entering the US during your academic program, and eligibility for on and off-campus employment during the academic year, summers, and after graduation.

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BEFORE YOU LEAVE HOME

1. STUDENT VISAS
Everyone—except Canadians and citizens of Bermuda—must have or obtain a student Entry Visa in the passport before traveling to the United States to study. Regardless of the visa issuance date, you may not enter the U.S. more than 30 days prior to the report date as indicated on item 5 of the F-1 I-20 or the “from date” on item 3 of the J-1 DS-2019.
**Do not come to the U.S. with a B-1/B-2 Visitor Visa or on a 90-day visa waiver (ESTA).** U.S. immigration law prohibits those in visitor status from attending classes and from changing to student status after arrival. You will waste your time and your money if you arrive as a tourist rather than in student status.

Government regulations require that you attend the university that issued the I-20 used to obtain the F-1 visa, so you should be entering the U.S. with a Columbia I-20 and an entry visa that has Columbia written on it, if this is your initial entry in F-1 status.

If you have been a student in the U.S. before and your F-1 or J-1 entry visa is still unexpired, you may continue to use that visa for entry with a Columbia I-20 or DS-2019.

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### 2. IMMUNIZATION REQUIREMENTS

**PAY ATTENTION** to the information you received from Columbia Health! You are not permitted to register for classes until you have complied with immunization requirements. If you do not register for classes by the end of the normal registration period, you will be in violation of your F-1 or J-1 status. Refer to the Columbia Health link below for information on satisfying the requirement:

**Immunization Requirements:**
[https://health.columbia.edu/students/immunization-compliance-requirements/immunization-compliance-requirement](https://health.columbia.edu/students/immunization-compliance-requirements/immunization-compliance-requirement)

**Immunization FAQs** are on the lower right side of the webpage

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### 3. STUDENT SERVICES INFORMATION


It’s natural that you have a lot of questions, and it’s not always easy to find the answer—especially at a distance. There are two websites for student services at Columbia that you will find helpful.

The first is designed specifically for new students at Columbia to orient you to the information you need as an incoming student and is found at [http://newstudents.columbia.edu/](http://newstudents.columbia.edu/). It includes information on activating your UNI and Columbia email, submitting your University ID Card photo, paying your E-Bill, health insurance, and dining facilities on campus.

Another useful portal is Student Administrative Services at [http://sas.columbia.edu/](http://sas.columbia.edu/)

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### 4. CREDIT CARD FROM HOME

Arrive in the U.S. with a credit card from home, if at all possible. If you haven’t lived in the U.S. before, you won’t have a U.S. credit history of paying your bills, making it difficult to obtain a U.S. credit card soon after arrival.

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### 5. INTERNATIONAL DRIVING PERMIT AND DRIVER LICENSE

The issuance of driver licenses is regulated by each state. According to information from the [NY State Department of Motor Vehicles (DMV)](http://www.dmv.ny.gov/license.htm), NY State recognizes your foreign driver license if you remain a resident of the nation that issued the license. Since you will be studying in the U.S. in a nonimmigrant status, you remain a resident of your home country, and do need to have a NYS license to drive in NYS. The disadvantages of obtaining a NYS driver license are that you must take the
complete driving test regardless of prior driving experience (unless you have a Canadian license) AND you must surrender your foreign license.

The DMV recommends that you obtain an International Driver’s Permit (IDP). The IDP is not a license—it only verifies that you have a valid license from your country. It is your driver license that allows you to drive in NYS. Although you are not required to have an IDP to drive in NYS, the permit does have value. The permit verifies, in several languages, that you have a valid foreign driver license. A police officer who cannot read the language on your foreign driver license can read the permit.

You cannot apply for an International Driving Permit in the U.S. so you should contact the appropriate authorities in your home country to get one.

6. SOCIAL, CULTURAL, AND ACADEMIC ADJUSTMENT
A great student-created series of 5 short YouTube videos on Cultural, Social, and Academic Adjustment:

Culture Shock: Phase 1 and 2
  http://www.youtube.com/watch?v=tPfB6GijM9Q&feature=related
Culture Shock: Phase 3
  http://www.youtube.com/watch?v=H82Ifq0HbTQ
Social Adjustment
  http://www.youtube.com/watch?v=C7iznNFGzlq&feature=related
American Handshakes
  http://www.youtube.com/watch?v=powo_XwMTZs&feature=related
Academic Adjustment
  http://www.youtube.com/watch?v=VbTKaZLLALo&feature=related

Social Customs and Cultural Differences is interesting to read before you get here, and continues to be useful to refer to after you arrive as you adjust to living in the U.S.
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. Many of their counselors have an international background and are sensitive to issues of adjustment.

ARRIVAL IN THE UNITED STATES

7. DOCUMENT PROCESSING AT THE AIRPORT- VERY IMPORTANT
Be sure to have your original documents (not photocopies) on your person rather than in your luggage as you will have to present them to the CBP (Customs and Border Protection) official upon your arrival, which precedes going to baggage claim.

The inspector will need to see the visa page (except citizens of Canada and Bermuda) in your passport and the I-20 or DS-2019 form.

It is VERY IMPORTANT that your arrival is recorded correctly, including the port of entry of your admission, your class of admission, and the authorized period of stay in the U.S. For the majority of international students who will arrive by air, your I-94 record of admission will automatically be generated by the CBP official—AND they should stamp your passport with this same information. If you arrive by a land border, you need to be issued a paper I-94 “Arrival/Departure Record”.


**VERY IMPORTANT:** Your passport should be stamped and notated with admitted as “F-1 or J-1 for D/S”. D/S stands for “Duration of Status”. After your arrival, check the electronic version at [https://i94.cbp.dhs.gov/i94](https://i94.cbp.dhs.gov/i94) for accuracy. You may also need to print a paper copy as evidence of your status for other purposes such as employment eligibility on campus.

CANADIANS and citizens of Bermuda are exempt from the visa requirement but MUST present your I-20 or DS-2019 when entering the U.S. AND be sure that your passport is stamped as above.

DEPENDENTS: If you are coming with your spouse and/or children, the same awareness to the processing of their admission should apply. Dependents of F-1 and J-1 students should enter with a passport stamp of “F-2 for D/S” or “J-2 for D/S.”

Be attentive! Although you may be tired after your trip, it is to your advantage to know what to expect and to be mindful of what occurs at the port of entry. Having your passport stamped properly is VERY IMPORTANT.

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**8. GETTING TO CAMPUS**

You can get to Manhattan from one of the three area airports by taxi, bus, 9-passenger vans, and/or by train. Use ONLY a yellow or green taxi from the official taxi line—and ignore anyone else claiming to be a taxi driver or offering you a special discount. From JFK airport the flat rate to anywhere in Manhattan is $52—plus a tip on that amount (10 — 20%) plus the cost of the toll for the bridge from Queens to Manhattan—about $7. When giving the driver your destination, it’s customary to provide the address plus the cross streets. For example, you would say 400 W. 119th St. between Amsterdam Ave. and Morningside Drive. Information about Ground Transportation can be found at the websites below:


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**9. REPORTING YOUR ARRIVAL ONLINE: SEVIS REGISTRATION—VERY IMPORTANT!**

[http://tinyurl.com/issocheckin](http://tinyurl.com/issocheckin)

Please report your arrival in the United States within your first week in the U.S. (or for SEVIS transfer students already in the U.S., report your arrival at Columbia — with the online form linked above. To complete the form, you will need

- your passport
- I-20 or DS-2019
- your record of arrival in the U.S. from [https://i94.cbp.dhs.gov/i94](https://i94.cbp.dhs.gov/i94) or a paper I-94 card if you last arrived via a land border or before April 26, 2013
- provide your local address—even if it’s temporary—with a postal zip code.


Reporting your arrival is the first update to your SEVIS record, and will activate your SEVIS record. The second update to your record will be the ISSO reporting on your enrollment (registration) status. You MUST BE REGISTERED FULLTIME by the end of the second week of classes.

If you report your arrival with a temporary address, please update your address when you move at [https://www1.columbia.edu/sec/cu/isco/address_change.html](https://www1.columbia.edu/sec/cu/isco/address_change.html)
You must also keep your address up to date in the University’s central system at https://ssol.columbia.edu/

10. TEMPORARY ACCOMODATION
Columbia’s Office of Work-Life is intended for employees, but has a useful compilation of temporary accommodation for new arrivals and visitors. <http://worklife.columbia.edu/temporary-housing-options>. An additional resource not listed there is Sara’ Homestay Quality Student Housing <http://www.sarahomestay.com/>

11. OPENING A BANK ACCOUNT
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/issso/incoming/CU_Area_banks.pdf

12. FULLTIME REGISTRATION STATUS REQUIRED BY THE END OF THE REGISTRATION PERIOD EACH TERM
Check your registration status at https://ssol.columbia.edu/ to be sure that it is fulltime.