

International Student Handbook 2020-2021



**INTERNATIONAL STUDENT & SCHOLAR SERVICES
Office of International Affairs**

University of California, Merced

TABLE OF CONTENTS

OFFICE OF INTERNATIONAL AFFAIRS STAFF/MISSION	3
LOCATION AND CONTACT	3
OUR SERVICES	4
ADVISING SERVICES	5
IMPORTANT IMMIGRATION DOCUMENTS	5-6
MAINTAINING YOUR VISA STATUS	7-8
WHEN DO YOU NEED TO REQUEST A NEW I-20 OR DS-2019?	8
SEVIS: STUDENT AND EXCHANGE VISITOR INFORMATION SYSTEM	8
REQUIREMENTS FOR TRAVEL OUTSIDE OF THE U.S.	9
EMPLOYMENT IN THE UNITED STATES FOR F-1 AND J-1 STUDENTS	9-10
WHEN YOUR LEGAL STATUS IS LOST	10
SOCIAL SECURITY NUMBER/CARD	11
MONEY, BANKING TAXES	12-13
DRIVER LICENSE/ID/TRANSPORTATION	13
HOUSING/HEALTH INSURANCE/CATCARD	13-15
OIA PROGRAMS/ENGLISH LANGUAGE INSTITUTE	15-16
TIPS FOR LIVING IN THE US/CULTURE SHOCK/SAFETY	17-18
USEFUL CONTACT INFORMATION/EMERGENCY PHONE NUMBERS	19-20

**INTERNATIONAL STUDENT & SCHOLAR SERVICES
OFFICE OF INTERNATIONAL AFFAIRS STAFF**

<i>Director</i>	Garett Gietzen.....(+1) 209-285-9780
<i>Assistant Director, International Students & Scholars</i>	Becky Mirza(+1) 209-355-0913
<i>International Scholar Advisor/Visa Specialist</i>	Rico Johnson.....(+1) 209-355-1018
<i>International Student Advisor/Visa Specialist</i>	Lacey Long-Vejar(+1) 209-259-8913
<i>International Office Manager</i>	Vacant(+1) 209-228-4722
<i>Assistant Director, Study Abroad</i>	Craig Harmelin (+1) 209-228-4667
<i>Study Abroad Advisor</i>	Jennifer Heinrich(+1) 209-228-4025
<i>Study Abroad Advisor</i>	Ceceilia Nunez(+1) 209-228-2735
<i>International Office Main Line, KL 101</i> (+1) 209-228-4722
<i>International Office Fax</i> (+1) 209-228-4708

OUR MISSION

The Office of International Students and Scholars (ISS) within the Office of International Affairs is here to support and advocate for UC Merced-sponsored international students, researchers, professors and other visiting scholars. We provide resources of information and assistance with University-sponsored visas and immigration regulations for campus administrators and faculty members, ISS is also UC Merced’s primary liaison with the government agencies that interface with international students and scholars.

ISS strives to contribute to a successful experience for every international student and scholar at UC Merced, and to promote international education for its valuable contributions to the campus and global communities. By assisting with the integration of international students and scholars into the UC Merced community, ISS is proud to help facilitate the global exchange of knowledge and enhanced cultural understanding.

LOCATION AND CONTACT

The International Office is located in KL 101, down the hall from the Students First Center. We can be contacted by phone, fax, or email (international@ucmerced.edu). Come in to see us or call our front desk at 1-209-228-4722 to ask general questions. If you need extensive assistance you may be referred to an international student advisor for a “walk-in” meeting or you may need to schedule an appointment to ensure that your needs are met.

GENERAL OFFICE HOURS

The International Office is open all year long with reduced hours during summer and is closed on official University holidays. General office hours are Monday through Thursday from 9 a.m. to 4 p.m. and Friday from 9 a.m. to 2 p.m.

It is best to make an appointment if you need to see an International Student Advisor to ensure the advisor is available especially if the meeting will take longer than 10-15 minutes. Visitors will be seen on a first-come, first-serve basis if an advisor is available.

Due to COVID-19, our main office (KL-101) is closed for in-person business until January 10th. We're available remotely, 8 to 5 M-F, to answer questions and provide other services. We hope to resume in person services beginning the Spring 2021 semester.

OUR SERVICES

- Information and advice for international students, scholars, their dependents and university personnel on compliance with United States immigration laws and regulations
- Counseling, assistance and documentation for visa applications and changes in visa status, including non-immigrant and immigrant petitions
- Advice and authorization for employment and travel
- Verification, tracking and submission of visa status notifications through the Student and Exchange Visitor Information System (SEVIS)
- Referral to other offices and services within UC Merced and the Merced community
- Representation of the University to federal and state governmental agencies concerned with international visitors to the United States
- Orientation sessions for new international students
- Visa workshops and training sessions
- Support and information to help the international population adjust to life in the United States

Note: It is increasingly important that international students and scholars seek guidance and advice from ISS. Do not rely on friends, colleagues, the internet or anyone who does not have immigration regulation expertise to give you accurate or up-to-date information that may affect your ability to remain in the US and future immigration benefits.

ADVISING SERVICES

The International Student Advisor is equipped to help provide information for foreign nationals about the following: academic, immigration, legal, career, financial, personal, and family matters. We also help with cross-cultural adjustment and professional integration upon returning home. One of our goals is to enhance the awareness and understanding of cross-cultural and international issues.

Contact Information for International Student Advisor:

Lacey Long-Vejar

International Student Visa Specialist

Phone: (209) 259-8913

E-mail: llongvejar@ucmerced.edu

UC Merced Office of International Affairs

Kolligian Library, Room 101

IMPORTANT IMMIGRATION DOCUMENTS

- I-94 Arrival/Departure Record:** If you arrive by airplane to the US, the I-94 pictured below is no longer a card given to you by the Customs and Border Patrol (CBP) at the US port of entry. CBP has automated the I-94 process. You must now retrieve your I-94 on the CBP web page after each arrival to the US: <https://i94.cbp.dhs.gov/I94/#/home>

Discontinued Physical I-94 Card

New Electronic I-94

- Visa & Visa Status:** It is very important to understand the difference between visa and visa status.
 - A visa** is a sticker or stamp placed on your passport by a visa official at a U.S. Consulate. An F-1 or J-1 visa stamp can only be obtained outside of the U.S. at a U.S. embassy or consulate. Your visa stamp allows you entry into the United States and has information on it about the number of times you are allowed entry. If your visa stamp only allows one entry, you must apply for a new visa once you travel outside of the U.S. Note: The “Expiration Date” on your visa indicates the last date you are allowed entry into the U.S using that entry visa stamp, but it does not limit the duration of your stay in the United States. Your visa stamp can expire while you remain in valid F status in the U.S.

- **Visa status** is granted by immigration at the port of entry to the United States. Visa status is documented on your I-94, your passport along with your form I-20 or form DS-2019. To maintain your legal status in the U.S., refer to your program end date on your form I-20 or form DS-2019, retain the I-94 and a valid passport. More information on maintaining status is discussed below.



- **Passport:** The U.S. government requires international students to keep their passports valid for at least 6 months into the future. If your passport expiration date is getting close, be sure to renew it at least 6 months before it expires. In some cases if you are working on campus the university payroll will not be able to issue a paycheck in the U.S. if your passport is expired. Only your government may extend your passport, so you may want to contact your country's embassy or consulate in the U.S. to get information about renewing or extending passports. To find phone numbers and addresses for foreign embassies in the U.S. go to <http://www.embassy.org>.
- **Form I-20 (F-1 Visa Students):** The Form I-20 proves that you are legally enrolled in a program of study in the U.S. It contains your personal information, the sponsoring school's information, academic program information including the length of your degree program and financial information. Be sure to speak to your international student advisor if your form I-20 is going to expire and you are not able to complete your degree program before the expiration date. Once your form I-20 expires, your 60 day grace period begins and no changes can be made to this expiration date.
- **Form DS-2019 (J-1 Visa Students):** The Form DS-2019 proves that you are legally enrolled in a program of study in the U.S. It contains your personal information, the sponsoring school's information, academic program information including the length of your program and financial information. For degree seeking students, be sure to speak to your international student advisor if your form DS-2019 is going to expire and you are not able to complete your program before the expiration date. Once your form DS-2019 expires, your 30-day grace period begins and no changes can be made to this expiration date.
- **SEVIS Fee Receipt:** Congress mandated all international students and exchange visitors must pay the SEVIS I-901 (SEVIS Fee). This fee supports the SEVIS program office and the automated system that tracks and records changes of students and exchange visitors. All students or exchange visitors who are issued an initial Form I-20 or DS-2019 are responsible for paying the SEVIS Fee. It is very important for you to keep this receipt and that the payment is attached to your current UC Merced SEVIS ID number.

KEEP YOUR DOCUMENTS AND INFORMATION SAFE!

- Make a copy of ALL documents
- Store the original and the set of copies in two separate and safe locations.
- Carry a wallet-size copy of your I-94 with you.
- Take your original documents with you when traveling outside of the country and even when traveling inside of the United States.
- Never carry your Social Security card with you.

An F-1 or J-1 nonimmigrant classification is given to students who come to the U.S., commonly referred to as your “status”. If a dependent comes to the U.S. to be with an F-1 or J-1 student (example: a spouse or a child under 21 years of age), he or she is given F-2 or J-2 status. F-2 and J-2 status is valid as long as the F-1/J-1 student maintains valid status.

MAINTAINING YOUR VISA STATUS

The International Student & Scholar’s office (ISS) helps international students and scholars maintain their nonimmigrant visa status. There are documents required for maintaining F1, J-1, and H-1B nonimmigrant visas that deal with travel, dependent travel, changes of degree program, transfer of schools, extension of stay, employment options, and in some cases, for entry in to the United States. International student or scholar advisor will either prepare these documents for you or assist you in preparing them for yourself.

- **Maintaining status:** Staying in status is **critical** to your legal stay in the United States. If you fall out of status, you risk losing your benefits and legal standing. If you lose your status, you must apply for reinstatement with U.S. Citizenship and Immigration Services. If denied reinstatement, you could receive orders for immediate departure from the United States.
- **When you arrive:** All new international students must attend the mandatory new international student orientation. If you miss this mandatory orientation you must make an appointment with an international student advisor shortly after arriving on campus. Bring your passport and visa, your Form I-20 or Form DS-2019, your SEVIS fee receipt and I-94 along with your current address in the United States.
- **Fulltime enrollment:** Undergraduate and graduate students must enroll in a full-time course load every semester to maintain their visa status. For undergraduate students and graduate students with TA or GSR appointments, full-time is 12 units. For graduate students without a TA or GSR appointment full-time is 8 units. For graduate students, research related to the academic degree program may also contribute to your full-time status with approval from your Graduate Group faculty members. Students **must** immediately notify the International Students and Scholars Services when considering dropping below full-time enrollment as unauthorized part-time enrollment will violate F-1 status.
- **Valid I-20/DS-2019:** Make sure your Form I-20 (F-1 students) or Form DS-2019 (J-1 students) remains valid. Check the “completion date” or “program end date” on the I-20 or DS-2019. If you will not complete your program by the date mentioned in this form, you must speak with ISS and apply for an extension. This must be done **no less than 30 days before it expires**.
- **Valid passport:** Keep your passport valid at least 6 months into the future.
- **Work authorization:** Get the appropriate authorization for employment on-campus and do not work for more than 20 hours per week while school is in session. If students want to work off-campus or participate in an internship, they should make an appointment with the International Student Advisor to receive information about off-campus work authorization options.

- **Tell us when you move:** Update your address in your student portal within 10 days whenever you move so your Student & Exchange Visitor Information System (SEVIS) record can be updated as required by law. Also notify your International Student Advisor by email.
- **Report these changes:** Make sure the information on your I-20/DS-2019 form is accurate. If you change your major or degree level, change your name, change your funding sources, or need to shorten or extend your program, you need to inform ISS and get a new Form I-20 or Form DS-2019.

WHEN DO YOU NEED TO REQUEST A NEW I-20 or DS-2019?

- When you have a change of degree level (e.g. F-1 students changing from a bachelor's to master's or doctorate degree program)
- When your completion date changes, either by early completion or an extension
- When your major (F-1) or field of study (J-1) changes
- When you have a significant change in your financial sponsorship
- When you change your name
- When you are applying for Practical or Academic Training

SEVIS: STUDENT AND EXCHANGE VISITOR INFORMATION SYSTEM

SEVIS is an electronic reporting system that sends information about international students and scholars who hold F, J, and M visa status in the United States to the U.S. Department of Homeland Security (DHS). SEVIS also tracks entries to and departures from the United States. Every change you make in your academic program must be reported to SEVIS daily. Academic status, employment, and residential and mailing address is also reported and updated. All information on your I-20 or DS-2019 must remain accurate and up to date. If there are any changes on these forms (if your name has changed or the source and/or amount of your financial support is different, etc.) you must contact your International Student Advisor to produce an updated I-20 or DS-2019 document.

SEVIS REPORTING REQUIREMENTS

The following data must be reported to the Student and Exchange Visitor Information System (SEVIS). You must notify the International Coordinator of any new information and changes.

- Change of student address: New address must be reported to SEVIS within 10 days of move. You may report a change of address through the UC Merced Portal or at the International Office.
- Change of degree level (F-1 students, example: bachelor's to master's to Ph.D.)
- Change of major (F-1) or field of study (J-1)
- Falling below full-time student status (NOTE: You **MUST** contact your International Student Advisor **BEFORE** dropping below full-time)
- Completion of program/Graduation before the program end date listed on your Form I-20 or Form DS-2019
- Extension to your program beyond the end date listed on your form I-20 or form DS-2019

REQUIREMENTS FOR TRAVEL OUTSIDE OF THE U.S.

- You must have a valid travel signature on your Form I-20 or DS-2019 prior to travel outside the U.S. Please submit your form in the International Office 2 weeks in advance of your travel.
- Visit the Office of International Affairs if you need a new travel signature on your Form I-20 (F-1) or Form DS-2019 (J-1) before you leave. The signature is valid for 12 months during your degree program. F-1 visa students on approved Optional Practical Training require a travel signature every 6 months.
- Verify that the information on your Form I-20 or Form DS-2019 is accurate.
- Required documents: Passport (valid at least six months after the date of your return to the U.S.), F-1 or J-1 visa, and, if applicable, your Employment Authorization Document (EAD), and I-94.
- Recommended documents: Proof of the current semester's registration at UC Merced and proof of your financial support.
- Check your U.S. entry visa to make sure it will be valid the day you return to the United States. If you need to apply for a new visa, contact the staff at international@ucmerced.edu to find out what documents you will need to prepare. There is always risk involved when you apply for a visa as there is no guarantee that you will be granted one.

EMPLOYMENT IN THE UNITED STATES FOR F-1 AND J-1 STUDENTS

- **On-campus employment:** Limit your work hours to 20 hours per week during the semester. Full-time employment (anything more than 20 hours per week) is permitted during semester breaks. Be sure to provide APO/HR/Payroll with a copy of your actual Social Security card and any updated Form I-20 or Form DS-2019.
- **Off-campus employment:** All off-campus employment requires work authorization and must be arranged through the International Students and Scholars Office. Off campus employment for J-1 students is classified as Academic Training and F-1 student off campus employment can be classified as Curricular Practical Training, Optional Practical Training, Employment due to Economic Hardship or Employment Under the Sponsorship of a Recognized International Organization. Regulations and guidelines differ based on the classification of employment.
- **F-1 Student Practical Training:** F-1 students studying at the college and university level can seek authorization for practical training to engage in temporary employment to gain practical experience in his or her field of study.

There are two types of practical training:

1. Curricular Practical Training (**CPT**) is done prior to the completion of your program. You must either receive course credit for a CPT internship/job, your degree program must require it, or it must be a co-op program. If you are authorized for full-time CPT for 12 months you lose future Optional Practical Training eligibility. Contact ISS for appointment at least 1 month before requested CPT start date.
2. Optional Practical Training (**OPT**) can be used either before or after you graduate, generally for a cumulative maximum total of 12 months per degree level, if the subsequent degree is at a higher level. There are three categories of OPT: Pre-completion OPT, Standard post-completion OPT and STEM extension OPT for students with specific majors in the sciences, technology, engineering or math fields. Contact ISS to determine if your major is eligible for the 24-month OPT extension available to students with STEM majors.

ISS must recommend OPT in your SEVIS record before you can submit the OPT application to the Department of Homeland Security (U.S. Citizenship and Immigration Services) to obtain an Employment Authorization Document (EAD card). Contact ISS for an appointment at least 4 months before requested OPT start date, as the government processing time for employment authorization is currently averaging about 3 months. The use of fulltime CPT may affect your eligibility for OPT so speak with the International Coordinator if deciding to apply for OPT.

- **J-1 Academic Training:** J-1 students studying at the college and university level can seek authorization for training to engage in temporary employment. This employment is to gain practical experience in the student's field of study. The regulations state that a student may be authorized to participate in academic training "commencing not later than thirty (30) days after completion of his or her studies." The academic training must be directly related to his or her major field of study at the post-secondary accredited academic institution listed on his or her Form DS-2019; The student must be in good academic standing with the post-secondary accredited academic institution; and the student must receive written approval in advance from their academic dean or advisor and for the duration and type of academic training. The International Student Advisor must evaluate the academic dean/adviser's recommendation, determine to what extent the student has previously participated in academic training, and make a determination of whether academic training can be granted. The training must be approved before the DS-2019 expiration date.

Employment opportunities for international students are strictly limited by government regulations.

Illegal employment is considered a serious violation of status.

Pre-authorization is required from the Office of International Students and Scholars and, in some cases, from the U.S. Citizenship and Immigration Services, for off-campus employment. F-1 and J-1 students must have been in valid status for at least one full academic year (9 months) before pursuing off-campus employment.

Career Services Center: The UC Merced Career Services Center offers services and programs to assist students with finding a job. Visit the office, call 209-228-7272, send e-mail to careerservices@ucmerced.edu or log on to <http://careerservices.ucmerced.edu> for more information.

Academic Student Employment: To learn about on-campus opportunities, students are encouraged to visit UC Merced's Academic Student Employment Web site at <http://jobs.ucmerced.edu/n/academic/listings.jsf?seriesId=5>

WHEN YOUR LEGAL STATUS IS LOST

Failure to follow F-1 and J-1 regulations will result in you losing legal status in the U.S. and all related immigration benefits. Losing legal status means that you will not be eligible for any F-1 or J-1 services, employment, including on-campus jobs and you will not be able to receive a reentry signature on your Form I-20 or Form DS-2019. Also, your SEVIS record, as well as those of your dependents, will be terminated in SEVIS immediately after your loss of legal status. There is a possibility you might be asked to appear at an immigration office and can become subject to deportation from the United States.

In the event that you do lose your legal status, immediately meet with your International Student Advisor at ISS to discuss your options.

STUDY/EMPLOYMENT FOR F-2 or J-2 DEPENDENT VISA HOLDERS

There are strict regulations in regards to employment and study for F-2 and J-2 visa dependents. Employment under F-2 status is not legal. J-2 visa holders however, may apply to the United States Citizenship and Immigration Services to obtain work authorization. F-2 visa holders are not eligible for full-time study in the U.S. F-2 or J-2 children are able to attend elementary and secondary school on a full-time basis.

Under new immigration regulations, there is LITTLE ROOM FOR ERROR! NEVER assume anything about the immigration laws of the United States. Ask an adviser in ISS if you have any questions.

SOCIAL SECURITY / BANKING/TAXES/ DRIVERS LICENSE

Social Security

What is it? A Social Security Number (SSN) is required for everyone who works in the U.S., even Americans. However, a Social Security Card is not a work permit. Most non-immigrants should not have Social Security payments (FICA) deducted from their paychecks, nor are non-immigrants eligible to receive any Social Security benefits. You need to have a job offer to be able to apply for a Social Security Card.

The Social Security Administration has an online publication available for international students online at <http://www.socialsecurity.gov/pubs/10181.html>

Eligibility: F-1 and J-1 students with on-campus employment or a job offer and employment authorization are eligible for a Social Security number.

When to apply: Students are advised to wait at least 10 days after arriving in the United States to apply. In addition students must wait until ISS has registered his or her SEVIS record as active. The Social Security card should be mailed to you approximately two weeks after your application is approved. Be sure to provide a copy to our APO/HR and Payroll office if you work on campus.

How to apply: Visit a local Social Security Office and bring the following documents: Your passport, Form I-20 or Form DS-2019 Form, I-94 and job-offer letter from the employer. **You must apply in person.** An application form with instructions is available online at <https://www.ssa.gov/ssnumber/>

Where to apply:

U.S. Social Security Administration Office
600 West Olive Avenue
Merced, CA
Phone: 209-723-2072

More information online: <http://ssa.gov>

BE SAFE: ONLY SHARE YOUR SOCIAL SECURITY NUMBER WITH SOMEONE WHO HAS A LEGITIMATE AND SPECIFIC NEED FOR IT.

Money and Banking

Types of bank accounts: There are two basic kinds of accounts: checking accounts, for payment of regular bills and shopping needs; and savings accounts where money you do not need to use immediately can earn interest. Banks also offer a variety of other types of accounts and financial services.

Choosing a bank and opening an account: Before you open an account, you should research or visit several banks or credit unions online to compare their services and fees. To open a bank account is fairly easy - deposit your funds and complete any required bank forms. Most banks will require a minimum deposit. Some banks will want you to have a Social Security Number when you open the account.

Bank of America (BOFA) and Wells Fargo, both of which have offices in downtown Merced, are two banks that do not require a Social Security number to open an account. They do require two forms of identification and minimum deposits. Check with your bank for promotional packages and other possible fees. Chase Bank and Citi Bank are two other popular banks in Merced. Be aware that if you are making a deposit with an overseas check or bank draft, as you may have to wait three days to three weeks before your money will be available to you.

Taxes

All international students who work must file their income taxes.

Sales tax: Sales tax is a state tax added to any item sold, except for certain food items. In the City of Merced, the sales tax is 8.25% at the time of this publication. For example, a product might be marked as \$5.00 on the shelf but will cost \$5.41 at the register. Sales tax may vary by city and county. There are no refunds of sales tax.

Income Tax: The Internal Revenue Service or "IRS" is the U.S. federal agency for collection of national income tax. The State of California also collects a tax on income through the Franchise Tax Board. All tax forms and information cited here can be found on the IRS Web site at www.irs.gov or the Franchise Tax Board Web site at www.ftb.ca.gov. Publication 519 is the "U.S. Tax Guide for Aliens" and contains most of the information you might need about payment of federal taxes. If you have spent time in other states, you will need to obtain their state tax information.

Tax Withholding and the W-4 Form: When a person is working in the U.S., the employer is required to deduct a portion of the salary in each pay period for income taxes. At the start of your job, you will complete a half page W-4 form (Employees Withholding Allowance Certificate). The information on that form determines how much will be withheld from your paycheck for taxes.

Tax Treaties: Some countries have tax treaty agreements with the U.S. in which certain types of income may be exempted from federal tax. General information on tax treaty benefits can be found in IRS publication 901. The actual tax treaty text may also be found on the IRS Web site.

Social Security and Medicare Taxes: Anyone who works in the U.S. is required to have a Social Security number to be hired by an employer and for use in completing the tax return form. Social Security (FICA) and Medicare are U.S. government programs that provide benefits for U.S. citizens and U.S. permanent residents, usually for retirement. It is financed by taxes withheld from the paychecks of working people. International students should ask their employers not to withhold these two forms of taxes.

Income Tax Filing Requirement: International students and scholars who have been employed in the U.S. for any portion of a calendar year must file a U.S. annual tax report (also called a "tax return") by the following year's tax filing deadline. Income that is taxed includes wages, scholarships and earnings on investments. A complete list of taxed income may be found in IRS and state tax guides.

Driver's License and the California ID Card

Who needs a California Driver's License or ID card? The State of California does not recognize an International Driving Permit (IDP) as a valid driver license. California does recognize a valid driver license that is issued by a foreign jurisdiction (country, state, territory) of which the license holder is a resident. Most insurance companies will require a California driver's license, so it is advised you apply for one if you plan on purchasing and driving a car. The ID card looks like a driver license, but it is used for identification purposes only.

When to apply: Wait at least 30 days after your arrival in the U.S. before applying for a driver's license or California ID card. The application requires a social security number but you are exempt from this requirement if you are ineligible for a social security number. You must provide proof of residency when applying for either a driver license or ID card. Further information on the documentation required can be found on our website or by visiting the Office of International Affairs.

More information and where to apply: For additional information, including the latest California Driver's Handbook, visit the Department of Motor Vehicles at <https://www.dmv.ca.gov/portal/>. You can make an appointment online or contact the local DMV office:

Merced DMV Office
1313 12th Street, Merced
Phone: 800-777-0133

Transportation Options

UC Merced Transportation and Parking Services is your campus resource for information and services such as parking on campus, bus service, carpooling, alternative modes of transportation and more.

Visit TAPS online at <http://taps.ucmerced.edu> for additional information.

CatTracks is proud to be the official transit system for the University of California, Merced. With service from the main campus to the Castle extension campus, as well as to Downtown Merced and select North Merced locations. For additional online information: <https://taps.ucmerced.edu/cattracks>.

HOUSING/MEDICAL CARE/HEALTH INSURANCE/ CAT CARD

Housing

On campus: Undergraduate students can apply to live in on-campus housing. Applications are available online at <https://housing.ucmerced.edu/>. Be sure to pay close attention to application deadlines.

Off campus: The Student Housing Office also can help connect students with many off-campus housing options. Visit the Off-Campus Housing website <https://housing.ucmerced.edu/off-campus> for more information or our Arrival Guide also provides helpful tips.

Additional assistance: Call 209-228-4663 or e-mail housing@ucmerced.edu for more information.

Medical Care

To understand how the Student Health Insurance Plan (SHIP) works, it is important to understand that your health care while at UC Merced consists of two parts:

- * First, services through the Student Health Center
- * Second, services provided through the SHIP Blue Cross provider network or your personal major medical insurance.

H. RAJENDER REDDY HEALTH CENTER

The Student Health Fee guarantees you access to the H. Rajender Reddy Health Center. The Health Center has primary care providers that serve as your family or primary provider while you are at UC Merced. All registered students may use the services at the Health Center, regardless of what type of major medical insurance you carry. There are fees for some services that are not covered by the Student Health Fee (e.g., immunizations, prescriptions and over-the-counter medications, and lab testing).

STUDENT HEALTH INSURANCE PLAN

The University of California requires both undergraduate and graduate students to have major medical insurance. The cost of this insurance is now included in your student campus fees and enrollment in the plan is automatic. UC Merced provides an undergraduate (USHIP) and graduate (GSHIP) Student Health Insurance Plan to meet this requirement. USHIP and GSHIP cover care outside of the Health Center, including hospitalization, specialty care and out-of-area care while you are traveling. You may waive out of the UC Merced Student Health Insurance Plan if you have comparable medical coverage.

DENTAL CARE

Delta Dental of California is the dental insurance provider for graduate students. Students will receive benefits covering preventive and general restorative dental care. Note that dental care is not provided at the Student Health Center. Students can select from a wide choice of local dentists. Undergraduate students may optionally enroll in the dental program.

VISION CARE

Graduate students are automatically enrolled in the VSP Vision Plan. Benefits include an annual vision exam and medically necessary frames and lenses. Graduate students may waive out of the vision program if they have another vision plan. Students can select from a local provider listed on the VSP Web site. Undergraduate students do not have the option to enroll in the vision program at this time.

PLAN BENEFIT INFORMATION

For more detailed benefit information about the medical, dental and vision plans students can access the Wells Fargo Insurance Services Web site: <https://wfis.wellsfargo.com/ucmerced>

MANDATORY HEALTH INSURANCE REQUIREMENTS FOR J-1 VISA HOLDERS AND THEIR DEPENDENTS

The U.S. Department of State mandates that all J-1 students and their J-2 dependents have and maintain adequate health insurance. If you are a J-1 student your UC Merced provided USHIP or GSHIP insurance may cover these insurance requirements but you must consult with the Student Health Services to verify adequate coverage. As noted on the next page.

Minimum levels of health insurance coverage must provide:

1. Medical benefits of at least \$100,000 per illness or accident;
2. Deductible not to exceed \$500 per accident or illness;
3. Expenses associated with medical evacuation in the amount of \$50,000;
4. Repatriation of remains in the amount of \$25,000;
5. Coverage for pre-existing conditions after a 6-month waiting period;
6. Provision for co-insurance/co-payment that does not exceed 25% of the covered benefits per accident or illness
7. Policy underwritten by an insurance company that meets the rating requirements of the US Department of State or backed by the full faith and credit of the home country government, designated sponsor, or Exchange Visitor's employee group plan.

Anyone without insurance must obtain health insurance that complies with the requirements outlined above before ISS can validate your visa. It should be purchased prior to your arrival in the United States.

CatCard

The CatCard is the official UC Merced identification card. All students, faculty and staff affiliated with the University need to carry the CatCard for identification. The CatCard features a digitized photo, SmartChip and magnetic stripe. When you apply for your CatCard you must provide a government or state issued photo ID, like a driver's license or passport and you must have your UC Merced student identification number handy to verify that you are eligible to receive a card. Visiting scholars need to complete payroll paper work and be entered into PPS before they can receive a CatCard.

The CatCard (on-campus) is used for:

- Identification and status check
- Library card
- Meal plans
- Building access
- Residence laundry access
- Photocopying and printing
- Debit purchases at the bookstore
- Campus Dining (via Flex Plan and declining meal plan for on-campus residents)
- Off campus student meal plan (Ideal for students who commute to campus)
- Flex dollars prepaid services account
- Admission to the Gallo Recreation Center (the gym)

OIA PROGRAMS

Tea & Chat: International students, scholars, study abroad students and community members are invited to a mid-day tea party to meet and mingle with other UC Merced staff and community members. Students are able to relax and enjoy a variety of teas from around the world. This event occurs monthly during the semester. (Temporarily suspended for Fall 2020).

Global Lounge: Network, socialize and enjoy coffee with international students, scholars, study abroad students and any campus members interested in international education. This event is held biweekly on Fridays in COB2-290. (Temporarily suspended for Fall 2020).

International Education Week: A national event where people engage in international and cross-cultural education activities. At UC Merced there are various events and educational seminars to give students, staff, and faculty an opportunity to take part in this celebration of international education. Will be virtual in November 2020.

Study Abroad Fair: Several of the study abroad companies located throughout California, including the UC system wide program “EAP” or “Education Abroad Program”, come together to host a Study Abroad Fair at UC Merced. At this fair students will be able to look at materials and talk to representatives of the various study abroad programs available to them through UC Merced. This year the fair will be virtual.

Employment Workshops: Throughout the academic year the UC Merced Career Services Center hosts several employment workshops for students to get help and guidance when entering the working world.

ENGLISH LANGUAGE INSTITUTE

Since 1987, the State of California has required “that each campus of the University of California should require all prospective teaching assistants who will be placed in classroom settings to demonstrate competence in oral communication, including those for whom English is not a native language who should demonstrate competence in an oral exam comparable to the written Test of English as a Foreign Language examination, including but not limited to, the Test of Spoken English examination, and demonstrate an ability to communicate effectively before a group.” (Assembly Concurrent Resolution No. 41). The English Language Institute (ELI) facilitates the University’s compliance with this state mandate for incoming international teaching assistants (ITAs) through the following services:

- Arrange testing for those students who have not submitted a TOEFL iBT speaking score using the Versant English Certification Test
- Evaluate students upon their arrival to UC Merced by means of an on-campus evaluation and student presentation process
- Recommend whether the ITA may teach without further English support or whether additional workshops and English language coursework is required, based on the results of the test and on-campus evaluation
- Provide semester-long workshops and coursework to enhance English proficiency in speaking and listening comprehension
- Assist in the cultural adjustments sometimes required to teach and study in an American university through workshops and individual consultations
- Videotape ITAs teaching and, from this evidence, assisting ITAs to enhance their instructional skills
- Collaborate with ITAs to develop individual plans for improving English language use

- Coordinate conversation partnerships for students wanting to practice their language skills in an informal arrangement with native speakers of English

As the UC Merced student population grows, so will the number of students who graduated from international high schools. The English Language Institute will offer intensive English programs and English language skills classes for these students; in this way, their English language skills can be evaluated and strengthened before they enter the classroom and must compete with native speakers of English. For more information contact Belinda Braunstein at bbraunstein@ucmerced.edu, or visit the ELI website at <https://cetl.ucmerced.edu/>

TIPS FOR LIVING IN THE UNITED STATES

1. Use the Language

You came here to improve your English, so make every effort to use it daily. Not only should you try to speak English, but you should try to read American newspapers and magazines, listen to the radio and watch television. This will not only improve your English, but it will also teach you about American culture. It is also a good idea to speak English with other students from your own country! Americans enjoy talking with foreign students, but you may have to start the conversation. Ask them questions about the U.S. to show you are interested in learning more about American culture.

2. Be Honest

If you do not understand something, admit it. It's usually best to tell someone you don't understand something rather than trying to pretend that everything is alright.

3. Learn to Laugh at Yourself

Communicating in a foreign language is difficult, and you may get nervous about making mistakes at first. Laughing at your own mistakes and taking risks are positive ways of dealing with the adjustment process.

4. Get Involved in Activities

You must take the first step in making friends and participating in ELP activities. To get to know your classmates, ask them about their cultures and their experiences. Keeping busy with them and attending ELP activities is a good way to avoid homesickness.

5. Put Yourself in Other People's Shoes

Try to look at situations from the perspective of other people. Always ask questions and explain what you are thinking. What may seem obvious or reasonable to you may not be for someone else because of cultural differences.

6. Avoid Stereotyping and Making Snap Judgments

It's natural to judge everything you observe and experience here as "good" or "bad." However, this can block you from understanding American culture. Try not to judge people and situations until you feel you understand why they are acting a certain way. And remember, most things are not really "better" or "worse" than they are in your country. They are just different!

CULTURE SHOCK

People adjust to foreign cultures in predictable ways, but in varying degrees. Some people seem greatly affected by culture shock, while others hardly notice it at all. Some people go through culture shock in the first month, while others don't experience it until months later. No matter where people are from and what culture they travel to, most experience the adjustment pattern below:

The Honeymoon Stage: Everything about the new culture seems exciting and interesting.

Culture Fatigue: You begin to feel uncomfortable and start to see differences between your culture and the new culture. You become tired, both mentally and physically. This stage lasts a few days to a few weeks.

Surface Adjustment: You begin to understand the people and their ways; you feel more comfortable. You are able to express basic ideas without fatigue.

Hidden Problems: Although you outwardly seem to be fitting in, you begin to question certain aspects of the culture, get homesick, and possibly have conflicts with friends and host family. You may feel dissatisfied and think “everything would be better if only....” You may feel isolated, and wish to return to the excellence in performance that you were used to in your own culture.

I Understand and I Feel at Home: You accept the new culture and feel comfortable with the way of living. You may even feel like “one of them.”

Going Home: You begin to have mixed feelings about going home. You may feel guilty about not wanting to go home, because you know that others are eagerly waiting for you to return. You are afraid that others may not understand what you’ve been through and how you’ve changed and become more aware of the world.

Typical Signs of Culture Shock

- You get easily upset by small things which normally would not bother you
- You sleep more than usual without any reason
- You have trouble concentrating in school
- You cry a lot
- You begin to spend a lot of time alone in your room
- You begin to dislike the U.S. and feel that almost everything in your culture is so much better

If you would like to talk to someone about culture shock or difficulties adjusting to your new home, Counseling Services is here to help. For additional information contact Counseling Services at 209-228-4266 or E-mail: counseling@ucmerced.edu. Website: <https://counseling.ucmerced.edu/>

SAFETY

Although Merced is generally a very safe area, there is some possibility of crime in most areas of the United States. Take the following advice, be careful, and you should not have any trouble.

1. Always keep your room locked, especially at night and whenever you are sleeping. (In houses, bedrooms usually don’t have locks. You should be sure the front door of the house is locked.)
2. When someone knocks on your door, always ask, “Who’s there?” before you open the door. If your door has a “peephole,” use it to look out before opening the door.
3. **WOMEN:** Be careful about who you invite to your room or apartment. Also be careful when you go to someone else’s room or apartment by yourself.
4. Always keep the telephone numbers of the police, campus police, fire department, and hospital next to your telephone, so that you can find them in an emergency. Know your address. Important phone numbers are listed at the end of this handbook and are also listed in the front of the telephone directory.

FOR ANY EMERGENCY DIAL 911

- DO NOT go out alone at night—always take a friend with you.
- DO NOT get into a car with someone you do not know. DO NOT give rides to people you do not know.
- DO NOT carry large amounts of cash with you—use personal checks, credit cards, or traveler’s checks.
- DO NOT leave valuables (jewelry or money) in your room or car.
- If you have a car, always lock it when it is parked. Do not leave valuables in sight.

Although crime is not very common here, you should still be careful and aware so that you may have a safe and enjoyable time in Merced!

USEFUL CONTACT INFORMATION**International Students and Scholars:**

(209) 228-4722

Email: iss@ucmerced.edu; bmirza@ucmerced.edu; llongvejar@ucmerced.edu

Graduate Division:

Phone: 209-228-4723

E-mail: graddiv@ucmerced.edu; gradresources@ucmerced.edu

Undergraduate Student Advising

<http://advising.ucmerced.edu/>

Phone: (209) 291-9739

Email: ucmadvising@ucmerced.edu or bac@ucmerced.edu

English Language Institute:

Belinda Braunstein

Email: bbraunstein@ucmerced.edu; eli@ucmerced.edu

Students First Center

UC Merced Kolligian Library

First-floor lobby

https://studentsfirst.ucmerced.edu/contact_us

Office of the Registrar

Phone: 209-228-2734

E-mail: registrar@ucmerced.edu

Housing

(209) 228-4663

E-mail: housing@ucmerced.edu

Transportation and Parking

Web: <http://taps.ucmerced.edu>

CatTracks

Website: <https://taps.ucmerced.edu/cattracks>

Student Life

Website: <https://studentlife.ucmerced.edu/>

School of Engineering (SOE)

Website: <https://engineering.ucmerced.edu/>

Email: engineering@ucmerced.edu

Phone: (209) 228-4411

School of Natural Sciences (SNS)

Website: <https://naturalsciences.ucmerced.edu/>

E-mail: naturalsciences@ucmerced.edu

Phone: (209) 228-4309

School of Social Sciences, Humanities and Arts (SSHA)

Website: <https://ssha.ucmerced.edu/>

Email: <https://ssha.ucmerced.edu/contact-us>

Phone: (209) 228-7742

Business and Financial Services: Tax Compliance Information

Phone: 209-228-4075

E-mail: tax@ucmerced.edu

Office of Research

(209) 228-4429

<https://research.ucmerced.edu/node>

EMERGENCY PHONE NUMBERS

If you need to contact a staff member at the ISS Office after regular business hours or on the weekends, contact campus police at 209-228-2677 (209-CAT-COPS) and they will contact an international staff member for you.

UCM Police Department-Emergency: 911

UCM Police Department-
NON-Emergency:
209-228-8273

Merced Police Department-Emergency: / Merced County Fire Department-Emergency: 911

Merced Paramedics-Emergency: 911

Merced Medical Center:
209-385-7000
301 E. 13th Street
Merced, CA 95340